A page right out of history

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Chuck Junior is my kind of baby. You can play with him when you're bored, turn his volume down if he skreiks too much and power him down whenever you feel like it. I'm ready for pick 'n' mix fatherhood. Bring it on!

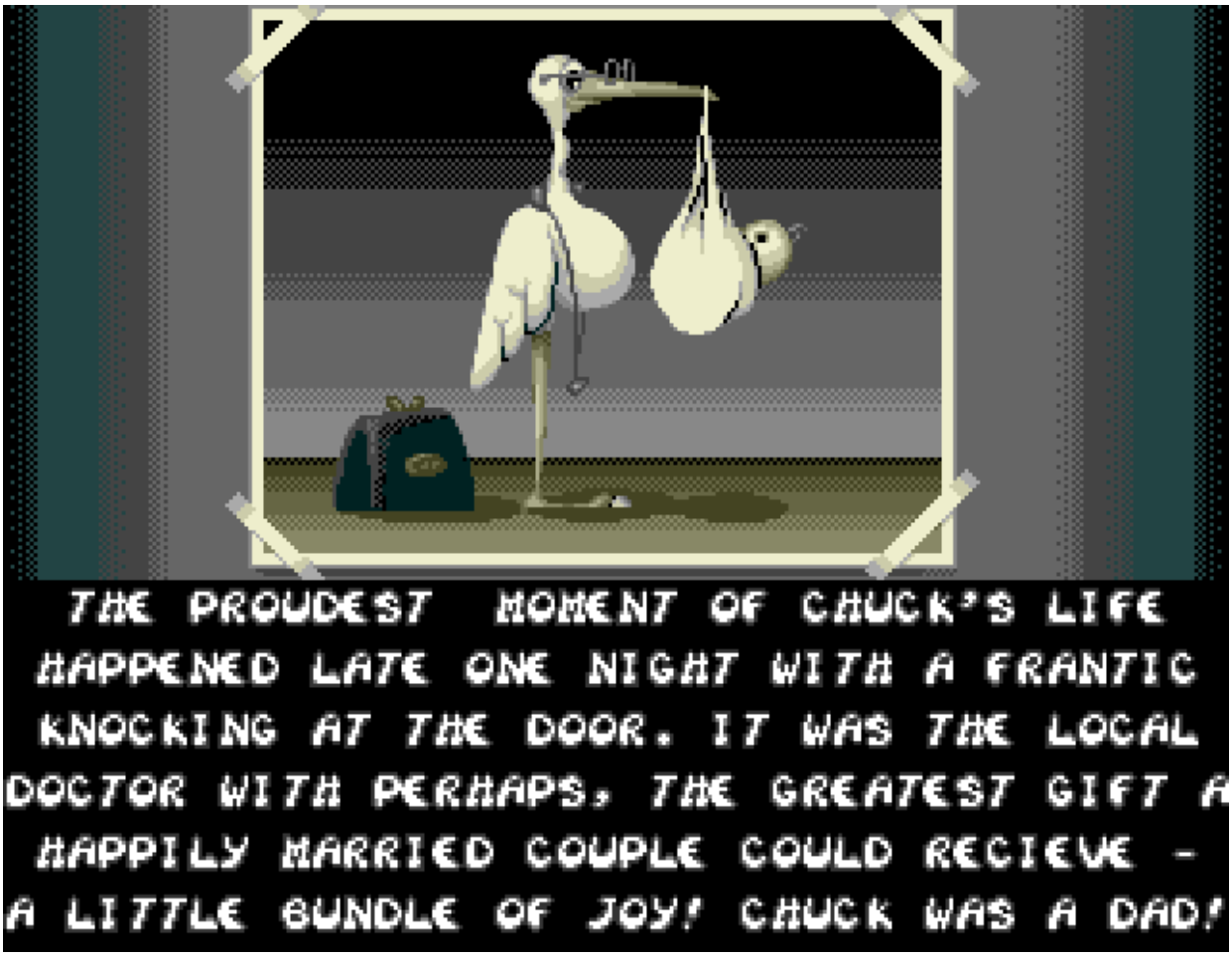
Son of Chuck is the sequel to Core Design's prehistoric hit platformer, Chuck Rock. Come in and meet the family...

Having rescued wife, Ophelia, from the loathsome Gary Gritter (how prophetic was that?), Chuck now finds himself at the centre of *another* kidnapping incident. This time his own,

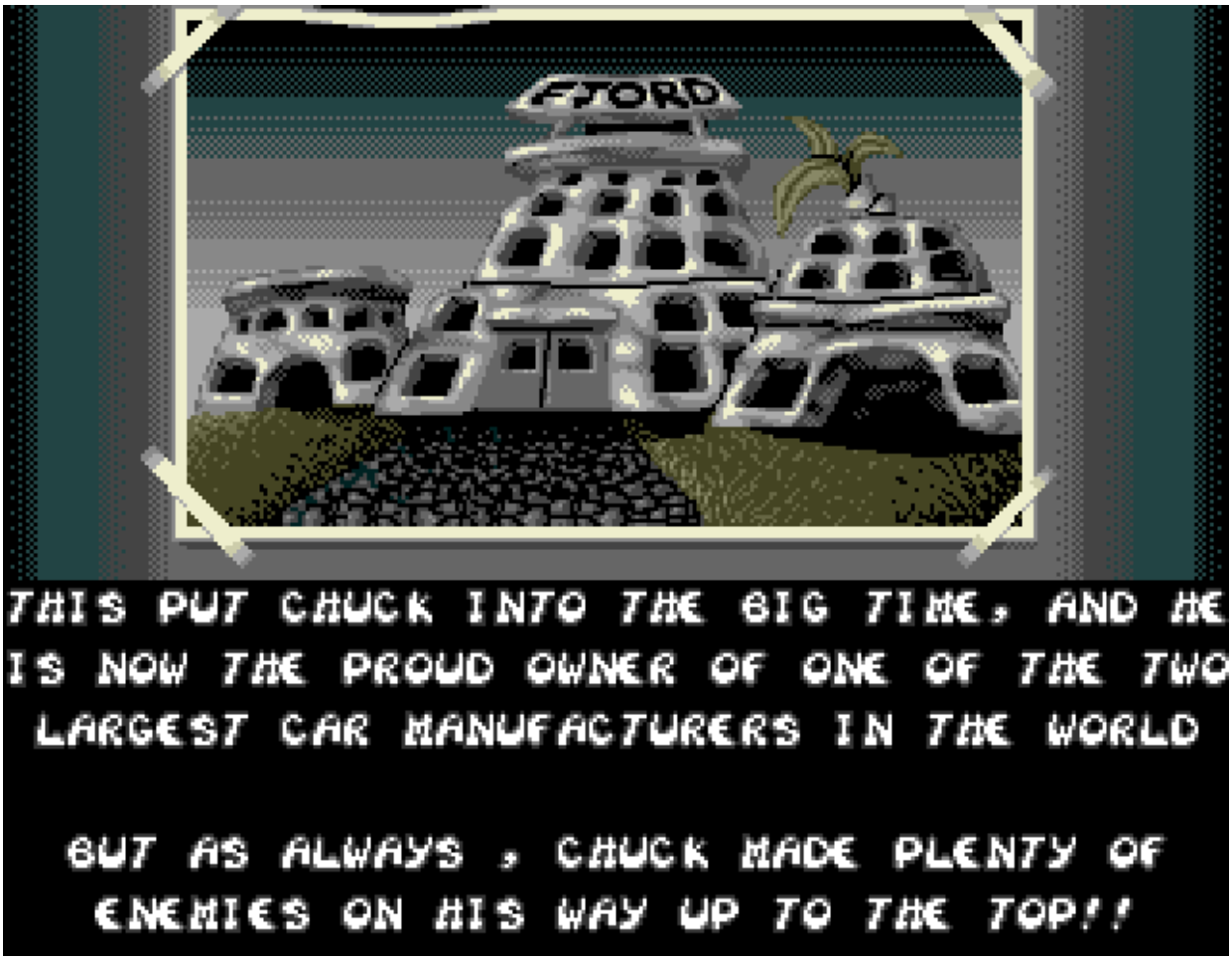
orchestrated by Brick Jagger. Yes, the rock puns don't get any better I'm afraid.

IT HAS BEEN AN EVENTFUL 10 MONTHS FOR OUR POT BELLIED HERO!!
SINCE HIS TREMENDOUS VICTORY OVER THE TERRIBLE GARY GRITTER, CHUCK HAS COME ON IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS!

OPHELIA DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO CATCH HER BREATH BEFORE CHUCK STARTED HUGGING HER AS IF THERE WAS NO TOMORROW. CHUCK AND OPHELIA WERE PROBABLY THE HAPPIEST COUPLE IN THE WORLD!! IT CERTAINLY WAS A GREAT MOMENT

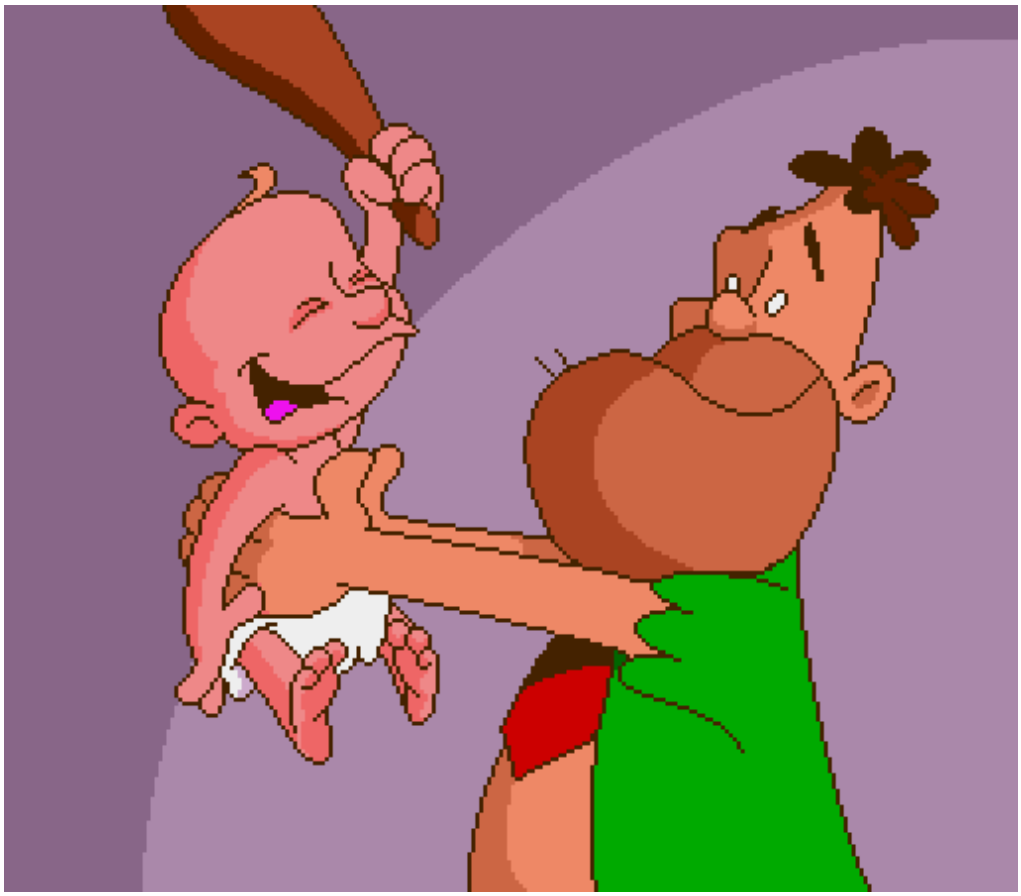

THE PROUDEST MOMENT OF CHUCK'S LIFE
HAPPENED LATE ONE NIGHT WITH A FRANTIC
KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. IT WAS THE LOCAL
DOCTOR WITH PERHAPS, THE GREATEST GIFT A
HAPPILY MARRIED COUPLE COULD RECIEVE -
A LITTLE BUNDLE OF JOY! CHUCK WAS A DAD!

Chuck is now the boss and founder of Fjord Motors, and inventor of the first car.

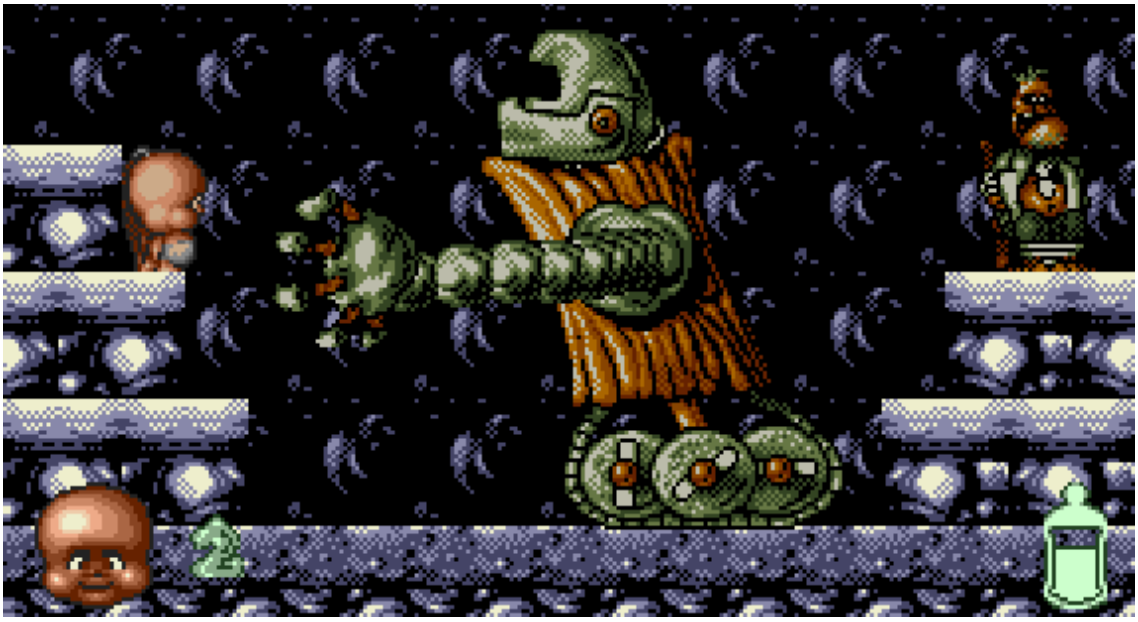

FORD
THIS PUT CHUCK INTO THE BIG TIME, AND HE
IS NOW THE PROUD OWNER OF ONE OF THE TWO
LARGEST CAR MANUFACTURERS IN THE WORLD
BUT AS ALWAYS , CHUCK MADE PLENTY OF
ENEMIES ON HIS WAY UP TO THE TOP!!

Brick Jagger, his arch-rival, runs the Datstone Car Company. Jealous of Chuck's success and unable to compete, he offers to buy him out, only Chuck is having none of it, his only concern being the long-term financial security of his family. 'No', not featuring on his list of permitted answers, Brick kidnaps Chuck with a view to coercing Ophelia into signing over ownership of their company to him in exchange for Chuck's safe return.

Despite being little more than a primordial embryo, baby Chuck cottons on to the blackmail scenario and busts free from his cot to attempt to defeat Brick and save his dad. And so our quest begins.



We must traipse through six levels comprising jungles, caves, volcanoes and mountains before squaring up to our nemesis himself at his company's HQ. Which no doubt would be easily traceable on Google maps so perhaps not the ideal secret lair to retreat to.



On route we'll encounter a whole menagerie of comedic renditions of critters you'd expect to find in the Natural History Museum, perfectly mirroring the style of the Flintstones cartoon. An approach that was clearly no mistake; Son of Chuck parodies the classic Hanna-Barbera cartoon beautifully, from the tongue in cheek zany humour, construction of the buildings and vehicles to the way in which creatures are employed as labour-saving devices.

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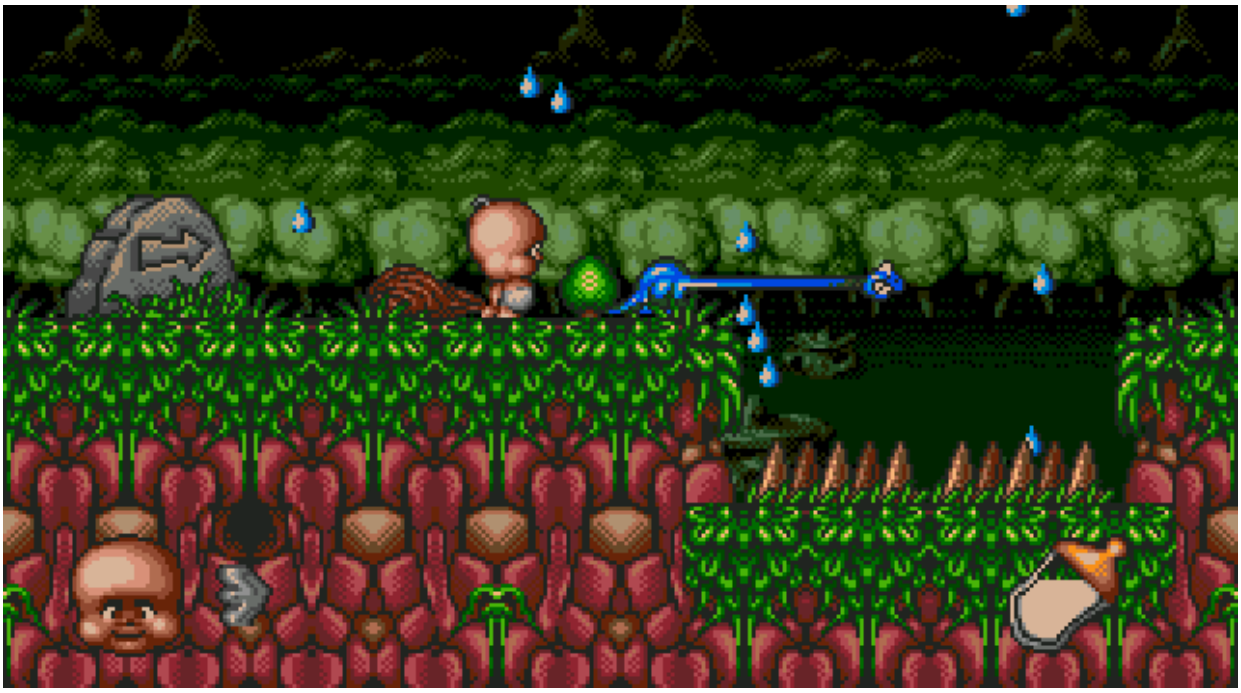
Whenever Junior bashes a boss into submission he celebrates by looking skywards and bouncing repeatedly on the spot, reminding me very much of a jubilant Garfield. I tend to add my own 'yabbadabba doo' in my head because Core didn't push their luck quite that far. In any case, Junior has more in common with Bamm-Bamm Rubble what with being a club-wielding baby. Whenever not in mid-swing this is dragged behind him, conveying a convincing sense of cumbersome heft.

It's a versatile tool rather than a blunt bludgeon. Balancing precariously on its tip, Junior can evade stampeding threats or rolling boulders, as well as using it to activate various baby-projecting devices. I'm not at all convinced by the scientific logic of the former, yet poking a sabre-toothed tiger

with a big stick is evidently a sure-fire way of convincing it to transport you to otherwise unreachable platforms.

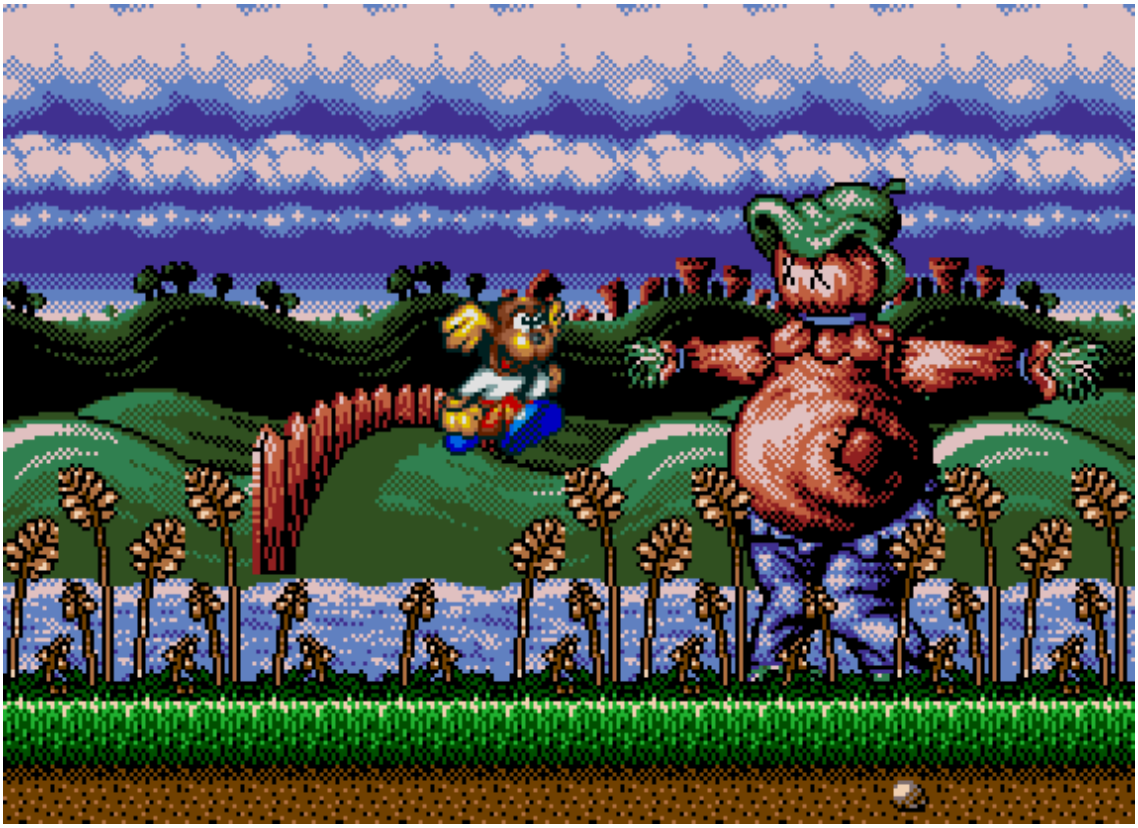


Like the Flintstones, Son of Chuck blends modern technology such as fire hydrants and telegraph poles with animal-powered, prehistoric inventions to ramp up the absurdity factor. For the best example, let me draw your attention to the caveman baddies camouflaged in dinosaur costumes. Whack them once and they lose their mask. Follow-up with a second swing and the remainder of the costume falls around their ankles, whilst the startled inhabitants run for cover.

Duel form baddies is actually a theme that runs throughout. Many require two hits to dispatch, switching their composition with each. A novel nuance seen in few British-designed games of this era.

Mini Chuck's manoeuvrability has been fine-tuned admirably by sole coder, Dan Scott. If the way he ambles about the landscape feels familiar and you've played Core's Wonderdog you may be interested to learn that there's a logical reason

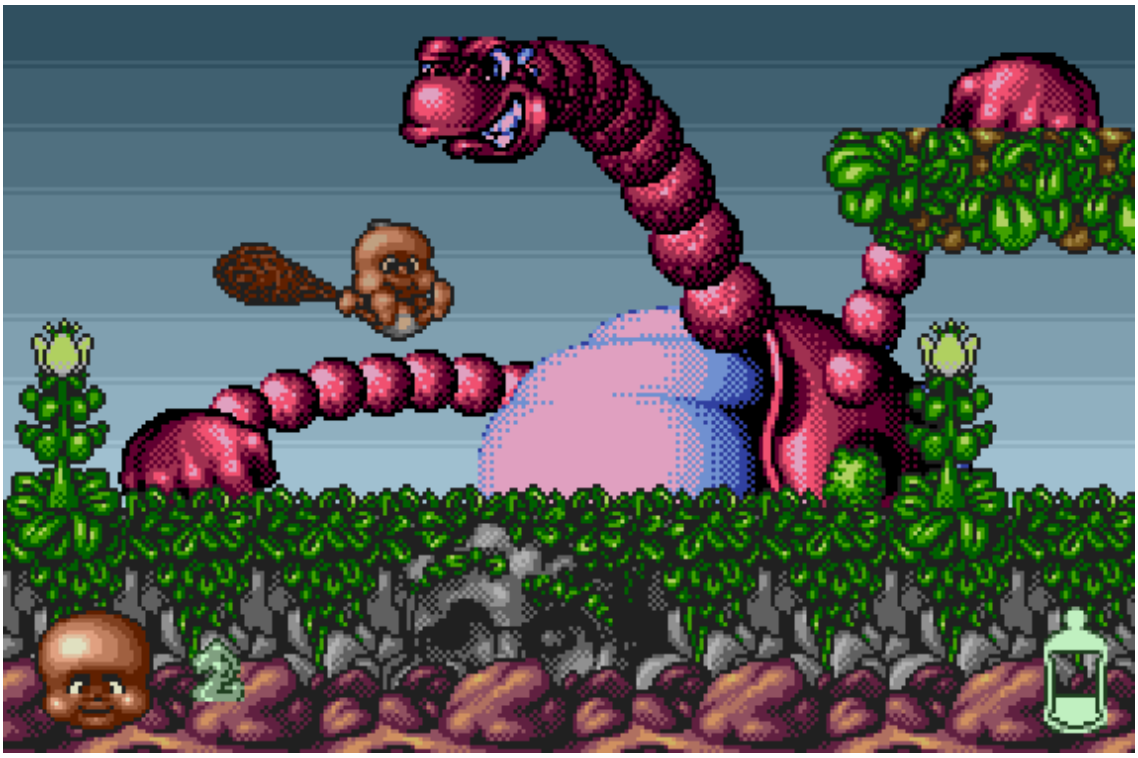
for this; they share the same engine. I'll let Dan explain, "Wonderdog was coded for Mega-CD, and then Chuck Rock 2 for Megadrive/Mega-CD was based around that engine. I then started Chuck Rock 2 on Amiga, and after, we decided to convert Wonderdog to Amiga too."



Both Chuck games were designed by Bob Churchill, Lee Pullen having devised the character initially. Lee returned to work on the graphics for Son of Chuck, and due to the additional complexity, this entailed also bringing on board Richard Morton.

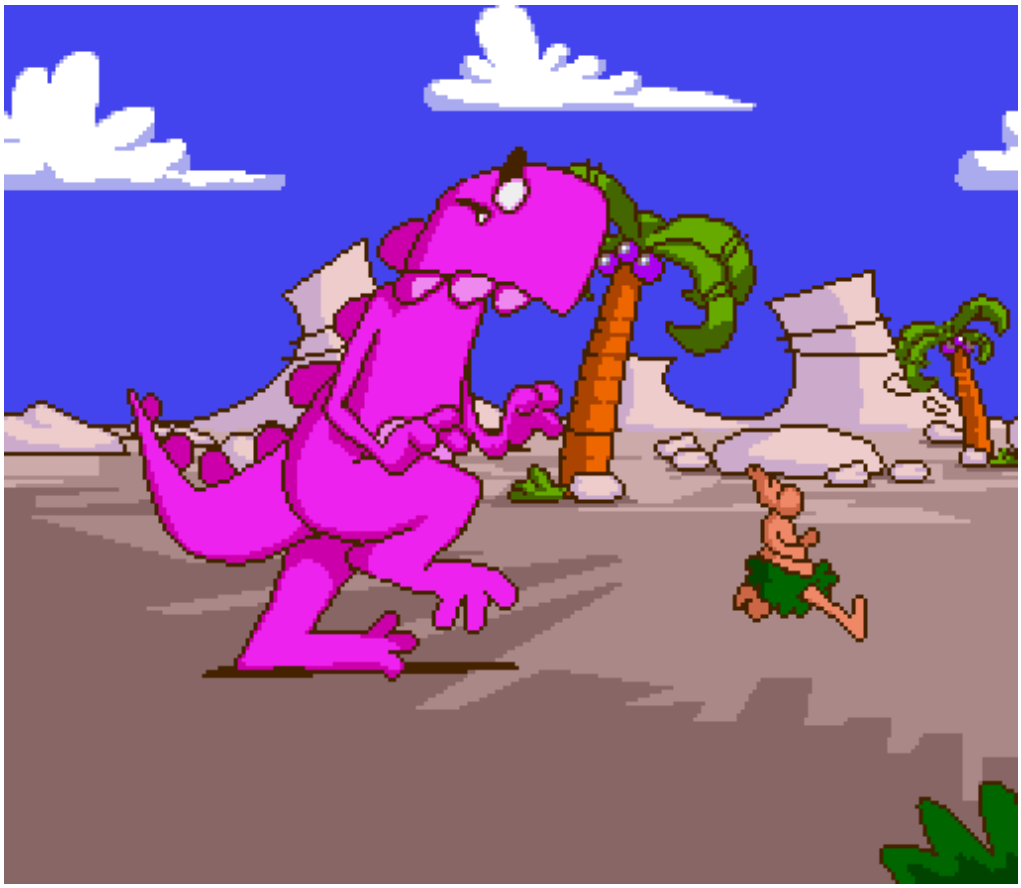
Dan and Richard were just nineteen years old at the time. Not that their relative inexperience counted against them. Son of Chuck really *is* a visual and mechanical wonder to behold. Aside from being charmingly intricate, the sequel executes a number of technical accomplishments yet to grace the Amiga at this juncture.

These include the choreography of immersive weather effects and up to 60, simultaneously on-screen, hardware sprites, some of them the largest witnessed in a home computer game. Boss one, for instance, is comprised of 27 individual sprites, dominating an area 192 pixels wide by 762 pixels tall, extending beyond the Amiga's typical playfield.



Elsewhere the Derby-based team engaged mosaic and sprite scaling routines, as seen in SNES games that take advantage of the console's Mode 7 technology. Three layers of extremely busy parallax scrolling are in effect, while the game runs at 50 frames per second, delivering a silky smooth feast for the eyes.

Martin Iveson's music and sound effects are equally polished, Bonking the goofy nail on the head. Coupled with an exceptionally well-animated introduction sequence, and the mock-gravitas of a Don Messick style, hyperbolic voiceover, it's easy to believe we've gone to sleep and awoken in the Toontown of the 1950s.

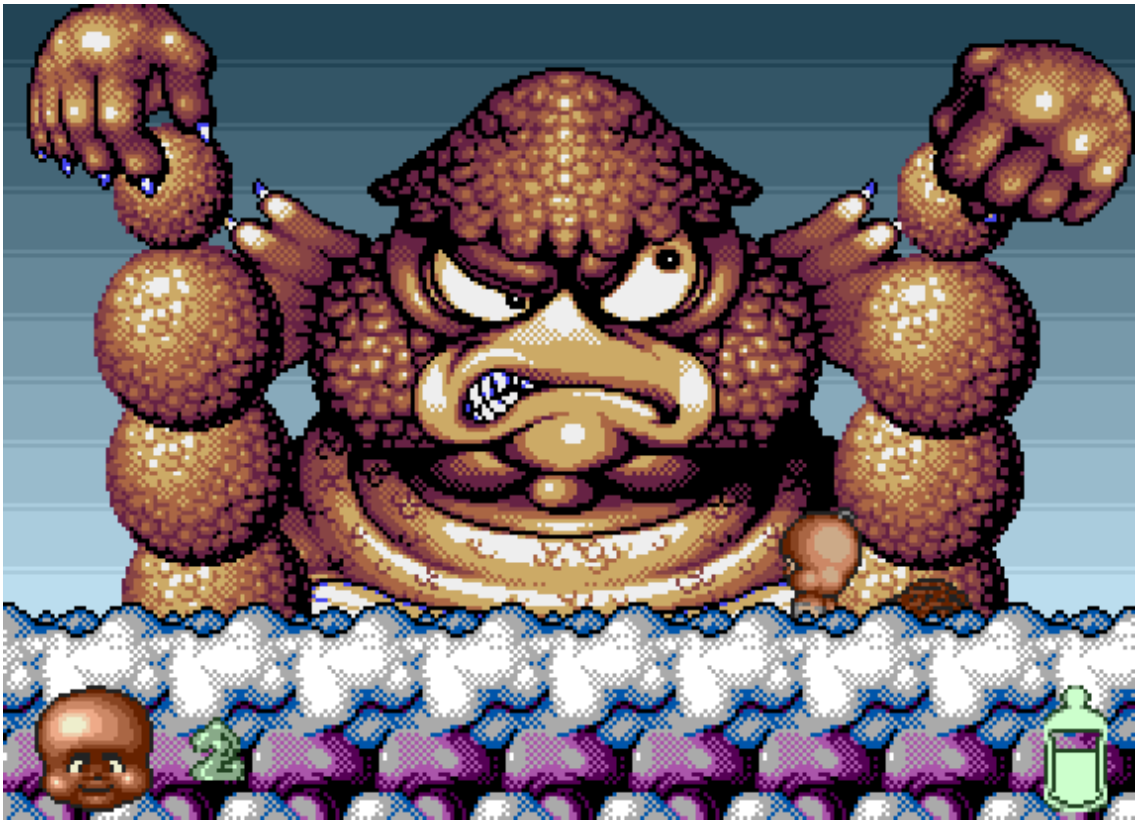


Inspiration for Junior and some of the end of level guardians he faces, however, can instead be traced back to the 1967 Son of Godzilla movie. Is it possible to infantilise a baby I wonder? Watch the movie, play Chuck Rock II and *then* decide.

Originally filmed for a Japanese audience, the dialogue is made up of weird mouth noises that make no sense. It's like another language entirely! There *is* an American re-dubbed version that might help if you can ignore the dodgy lip-syncing. Either way, it's a super-clunky cheese-fest produced on a shoestring budget. I wouldn't say it's so bad it's good, like say, Plan 9 From Outer Space, though we're encroaching on that territory. More like hilarious for five minutes. I watched it *all* to gather some hand-selected screen captures, and only then realised that the relevant clips are already plastered all over YouTube, each video with millions of views.

Not quite the obscure cult movie I first thought then. Feel free to contribute towards my therapy bills.

In a similar vein, Samuel the sea monster is clearly a homage to the Creature From The Black Lagoon.

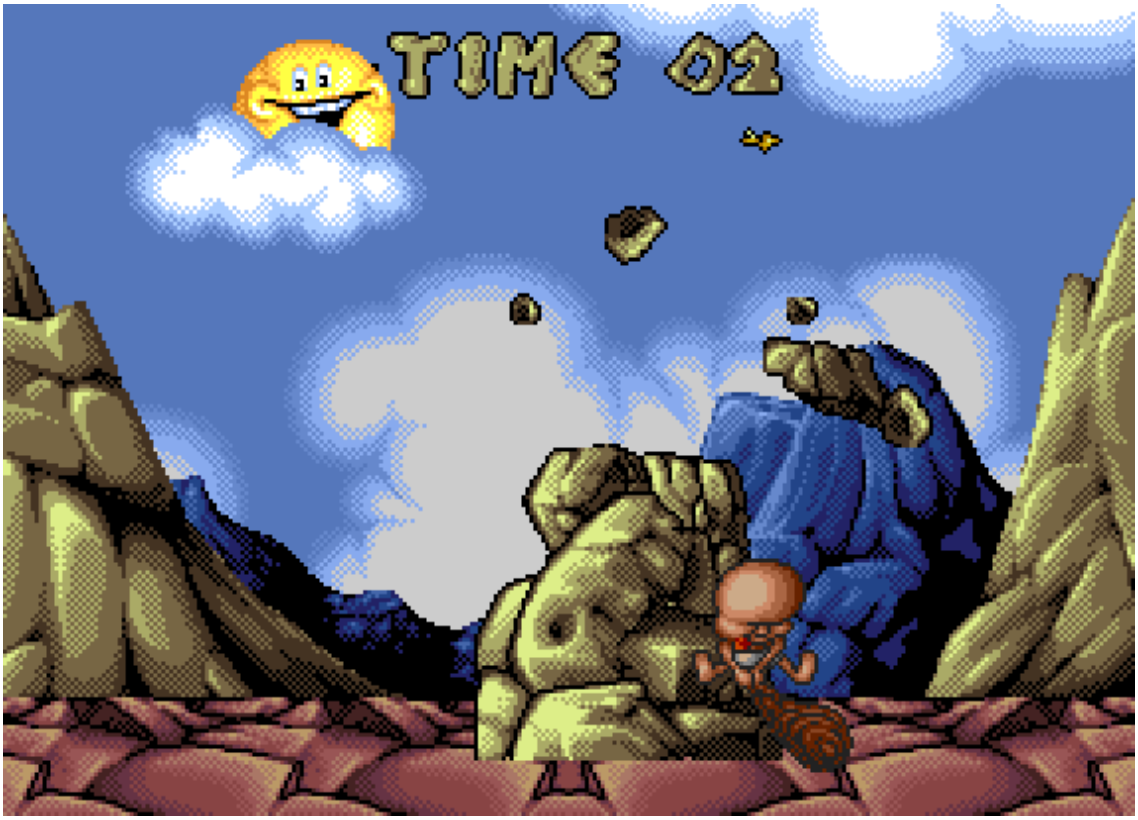


Core were ostensibly aware of how stale the platforming genre had become, thus pulled out the stops to set Son of Chuck apart from the sea of faceless contenders. This is evidenced in the variety of the five levels, each split into three stages. Some scroll left to right, others top to bottom or vice versa, while one *auto*-scrolls.

As in Bonk aka BC Kid, one level even takes place on the back of a dinosaur. It culminates in a boss battle with its lurching, irritable head. I expect he was getting anxious about the inevitable chiropractor bills.

In between stages are four diverse bonus sub-games that serve no purpose in terms of progression, yet *do* help to break up the traditional platforming mechanics. In the first of these, we're required to use 'Rover' as a springboard to knock apples out of an orchard against the clock. Shake lose all the fruit in time and he'll hoover it up with his chops and proceed to throw up. What further reward do you need?

Another diversion is based on Street Fighter II's car smashing bonus stage. Here you wallop a lump of stone, carving it into a statue of your dearest dad. Who'd have thought you could create a work of art simply by clubbing your canvas with a blunt instrument?

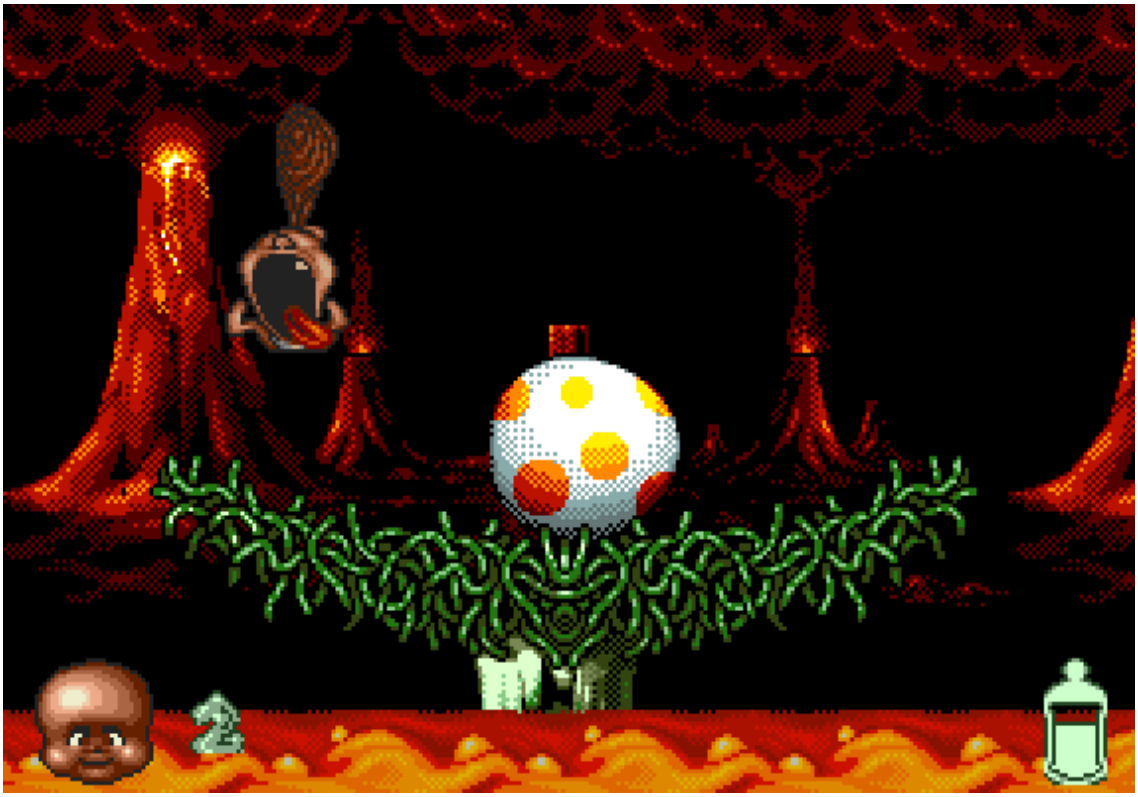


A joystick waggling boat race and a 'survive as long as you can while being dragged along in a cart by a dinosaur' 'em up constitute the remaining sideshows.

Much of Junior's environment is interactive. As in Chuck I, boulders can be nudged on top of spikes to forge a stepping stone pathway to safety, or employed as a stool to reach higher ledges. Nevertheless, belly-bashing these into alignment *isn't* an option. Several thousand dino burgers down the line, with some intensive coaching from Chuck Senior, maybe he'll be ready for that. For now he's sufficiently svelte to ride on the backs of horse substitutes found littering the landscape. These allow him to travel faster, leap higher and also absorb five extra hits before they expire.

Several levels of difficulty are on offer to suit all levels of platforming proficiency, making Son of Chuck suitable for all age groups. One tweak the easy option implements is marking traps and puzzles with explanatory arrows, although the game isn't especially challenging so as to warrant them. It's a fairly leisurely paced game from the outset, thankfully not marred by the tendency for developers to chase the Sonic-blur gimmick.

A tougher challenge for most gamers would be holding back from throttling Junior every time he emits his leaping yelp. That takes some will power! Given you're required to jump nine zillion times per level it stands to reason that could get a tad irritating if it's not subtle, or silent. Oh well, it *could* be worse, Yoshi's Island still holds the record for the most painful sound effects in a game, ever.



Triiiiio, Triiiiiiiio! I wanna Trio and I want one now! Maybe if Susie hadn't already scoffed 'em all.

To his credit, the precocious tyke remains a likeable little chap, largely thanks to his expressively animated personality and gorgeous pixel art. Every frame has been meticulously crafted to emulate the magnetic enchantment of our favourite Saturday morning cartoons.

Not a fan of astronomy then, Junior?

You *could* argue it's just an exquisitely presented wrapper to mask the creaking mechanics of a weary genre, as many have. In Son of Chuck's defence, I'd have to fall back on my default retort, catapulting mushy peas from the lofty watchtower of my pulpit-like high-chair, and giggling maniacally while kicking my heels against the legs. All counter-argument falls at the knees of baby logic. Once upon a time, I win. The end.